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Japan Grapples With Middle East Response

History may show that Iraq's August 2 invasion of Kuwait and its subsequent condemnation by most of the international community marked a watershed in Japan's global diplomacy. Tokyo responded relatively quickly August 5 in joining its Western partners in a trade embargo of Iraq and Kuwait as well as in a suspension of all financial transactions with the two countries and foreign aid to Baghdad. Yet it soon became clear that the United States and other Western allies expected Japan to shoulder more of the burden of defending its oil lifeline and protesting Iraq's contravention of the rules of international diplomacy. At JEI press time Tokyo was expected to announce an "outline" of assistance to Arab countries potentially harmed by Iraqi actions. The package also was expected to indicate measures Japan would take to support the Western military effort.

In drawing up this plan Tokyo was forced to consider how its prominence in the post-Cold War order may necessitate a reinterpretation of the legal constraints on the dispatch of military power overseas. Japan also was confronted with the suggestion that its oil-oriented Middle East policy, which up until this point has emphasized nonconfrontation and goodwill to ensure that the

Japan's Middle East Aid Expected To Reflect Crisis

Urged by Western and Arab leaders to do more than support economic sanctions on Iraq and Kuwait, Tokyo has been taking a hard look at how Japan can contribute to resolve the Persian Gulf crisis in view of constitutional constraints prohibiting military involvement (see preceding article). Foreign aid is the most frequently mentioned option. In 1988, the last year for which complete data are available, Japan disbursed approximately $583 million in official development assistance to the Middle East (see Table). How Tokyo will allot new forms of aid remains under discussion. Foreign Ministry officials have said they will assess the damage that sanctions have inflicted on other Middle East economies and determine relief funding on a case-by-case basis. Feedback from Foreign Minister Taro Nakayama's August 17-24 discussions with leaders in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey is expected to play a key role in formulating a new aid package for the region.

Key Recipients of Japan's Official Development Assistance in the Middle East,* 1984-88

(in millions of dollars)

Country	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Egypt	$81.5	$73.0	$125.7	$93.9	$172.9
Iraq	-4.6	14.7	15.2	70.2	-10.1
Jordan	19.8	13.2	37.5	24.4	14.5
Kuwait	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	2.8
Morocco	38.4	22.2	13.3	20.5	28.1
Saudi Arabia	21.7	10.9	13.5	2.9	6.5
Sudan	28.8	25.8	32.7	77.7	59.6
Syria	1.6	-1.0	7.7	45.1	107.1
Tunisia	19.4	10.5	5.2	0.9	36.7
Turkey	36.9	26.0	71.2	162.4	134.5
Yemen	9.9	10.5	15.8	21.1	25.9
Total Middle East ODA	249.0	201.0	340.0	526.0	583.0

Note: According to the Foreign Ministry's regional classification, the Middle East includes Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Yemen, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. This definition does not necessarily correspond to the one used by the Japanese government for other purposes.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Japan's continued dependence on Middle Eastern crude oil for about 70 percent of its imported petroleum supplies gives it an obvious interest in maintaining stability in the region. In recent years Tokyo has chosen to contribute to this objective through foreign aid. This helps explain why a country such as Saudi Arabia, which has a higher per capita income than most of Japan's foreign aid recipients, still receives economic assistance.

Most of Tokyo's foreign assistance in the Middle East, however, has been earmarked for nonoil-producing, moderate countries such as Turkey and Egypt. Egypt has appeared frequently among the 10 top official development assistance recipients in recent years. Foreign Minister Nakayama's recent talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak indicated Cairo needed about $2 billion to help offset the economic losses incurred after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. President Mubarak reportedly also asked Japan to craft an economic reform package in conjunction with the United States and the International Monetary Fund to help his country address its severe debt problems. A Japanese aid package reportedly was promised to Cairo, but the amount was not disclosed.

Mr. Nakayama heard similar requests for assistance at each stop during his recent Middle East tour. Saudi Arabia's King Fahd asked Japan to do everything possible within its constitutional limitations to help end the crisis. Riyadh specifically requested Japanese cooperation with transportation activities in the Persian Gulf, according to Japanese news reports. Mr. Nakayama's meeting with his counterpart in Oman resulted in an agreement that the Gulf nation would send a senior Foreign Ministry official to Tokyo sometime this fall to discuss the details of Japan's possible assistance to that country.

The wide range of requests presented to Foreign Minister Nakayama by Turkish President Turget Ozal included: loans for development projects, assistance in bringing private capital and technology to Turkey, promotion of tourism and expansion of air routes. Mr. Nakayama promised the Turkish leader that he would study these requests, but no specific aid commitments to Turkey or the other Middle Eastern nations were disclosed during his visit. Mr. Nakayama emphasized to the Middle Eastern leaders that while Japan will do its utmost to cooperate with its allies in the region, it cannot provide military assistance.

While Mr. Nakayama was in the Gulf region Foreign Ministry officials announced that Kuwait's exiled emir would dispatch a special envoy to Tokyo to meet with Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu. The officials indicated that Japan is considering providing assistance for Kuwaiti refugees in Saudi Arabia.

Tokyo has had to balance its desire to assist the Middle East with the recognition that many of the nations in the region have incomes that are relatively higher than those of other aid recipients or levels of debt that preempt additional loans. In recent months this juggling act has produced two loans administered through the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund -- Japan's soft loan window -- and cofinanced by the World Bank: $246 million for an agricultural project for Turkey and $73 million each from the World Bank and OECF for educational development in Jordan. The share of total Japanese ODA loans directed to the Middle East dropped from 5.5 percent in 1987 to 4.9 percent in 1988, although the actual amount provided increased by Y15.6 billion ($104 million at Y150=$1.00). Japan also has supplemented its aid program in the Middle East by responding to special requests for assistance, such as disaster relief.

Prime Minister Kaifu reportedly has urged relevant cabinet ministers to draw up creative options for Japan to pursue in the Middle East. Although the amount of additional assistance for the region still is being worked out, some foreign aid experts speculate that it will be financed through a combination of regular ODA outlays, specially appropriated funds and private money, such as from the Japan Red Cross. Observers in both the Middle East and the West will

be watching to see the extent to which recent events will tilt Japan's foreign aid priorities toward the Persian Gulf.

Margo Grimm

Japanese Public Waits For Government Action On Middle East

Although Japan has joined the world community in imposing sanctions on dealings with Iraq and Kuwait, most Japanese appear to agree that participating only in the international trade embargo is not sufficient. More concrete, visible measures, which seem to be getting little feedback from public opinion polls, are under consideration by the government. While newspapers devote a large volume of space every day to report on developments in the Persian Gulf crisis as well as the situation of Japanese nationals in Iraq and Kuwait, there are few articles covering public attitudes toward the crisis and/or proposed government actions. Moreover, none of Japan's major dailies or television news organizations has done an opinion poll.

Previous responses toward natural disasters and international military crises might help analyze Japanese attitudes to the current Persian Gulf situation. When Mexico was struck by a brutal earthquake in 1984, many Japanese criticized the government for its tardy response in committing rescue help, especially because other countries had responded quickly. Public opinion at that time was instrumental in the drafting and passage of a 1987 law that allows the government to dispatch rescue personnel to overseas disaster areas. As Japan itself is prone to earthquakes and similar natural disasters, most Japanese support Tokyo's help when emergencies of this type strike other countries.

In the face of international military crises, however, Japan in the past has hesitated to take prompt action on its own initiative. An experience in the late stages of the Iran-Iraq war underscores the apprehension with which most Japanese view active involvement. As the war escalated in 1987 then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone asked for a study preparatory to sending minesweepers to the Persian Gulf, where oil and other shipments of nonwarring parties were threatened in the waterway by submerged mines. However, Masaharu Gotoda, chief cabinet secretary as well as acting foreign minister, reportedly opposed the plan because Japan's constitution restricts it from committing troops at home or abroad except for self-defense purposes. Public opinion at the time mainly supported Mr. Gotoda, not only because of concerns about possible military involvement but also because of worries that Mr. Nakasone might be proceeding too hastily in committing Japan to help keep the Gulf open to shipping.

Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu has approached the present crisis very carefully. He postponed a long-planned August visit to the Middle East because top government and Liberal Democratic Party officials did not feel Tokyo was in a position to make concrete commitments while the situation in the Persian Gulf still was evolving. These advisers also recognized the difficulty of crafting a response that both would satisfy international expectations of Japan's role and be acceptable to the Japanese public. In putting off his trip Mr. Kaifu also took into account a visit's possible impact on the 500 or so Japanese nationals trapped in Iraq and Kuwait.

The postponement of the visit allowed the prime minister to devote a major share of his time in the second half of August to considering what Japan